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ABSTRACT

Two concurrent themes in recent educational reform efforts--teacher professionalism and parent participation--have not been easy to reconcile in practice. This study investigated the introduction of two controversial curriculum reforms in a small New England high school with an eye to the relationships that existed among parents and between parents and educators during the process. Using Eisner's work on educational criticism as a guide, the study used an alternative form of representation--reader theater scripts--to describe its results. The study found that it is difficult for parents and educators to come to common understandings about what goes on in "good" classrooms because: (1) parents have widely differing views, or mental models, based on their own school experiences; (2) the traditional or bureaucratic mode of school operation (as described by Goldring and Bauch, 1995) put administrators and teachers in the position of making educational changes essentially without parent participation, provided such changes were within the community's "zone of tolerance"; and (3) the new concept of teachers as professionals provides teachers with common mental models about what constitutes "good" education, but privileges these models and puts parents in the unequal role of client. The study concluded that redefining educators and parents as members of a community, held together by informal, responsive interactions, holds promise for reconciling current tensions. (Contains 50 references.) (EV)

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ED 407 113

Teachers and Parents Working Together For Curriculum Reform: Possibility or Pipe Dream?

Paper Presented
as part of the symposium:

"What Do Secondary School Parents Have to Offer Curriculum Professionals?"

at the

Annual Meeting of the
American Educational Research Association

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Introduction

Common understandings between parents and educators about what goes on in "good" secondary schools is one characteristic of successful schools (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Hill, 1990; Lightfoot, 1983). However, coming to these common understandings has not been easy. While many secondary schools have begun--albeit with much difficulty--to build common understandings among faculty members, including parents has proven to be even more difficult. Two concurrent themes in our current educational reform efforts--teacher professionalism and parent participation--in many ways make these efforts even more difficult. On the one hand, teachers are encouraged to take responsibility for what they do in their classrooms, to become the experts on curriculum and pedagogy. On the other hand, parents are encouraged to become part of the school's decision-making around issues of curriculum and pedagogy. Recently scholars have begun to examine this tension and to ask how it can be resolved (Goldring and Bauch, 1995; Henry, 1996; Konzal, 1995; Sarason, 1995, Strike, 1993). What educators often wonder is, "What do parents have to offer the discussion about teaching and learning practices?" and "Why is it important for parents to be part of a school's conversation about curriculum?"

While researchers and academics argue that it will take the efforts of us all--the expertise of both professionals and of parents--to solve the complex problems facing our schools today (Crowson, 1992; Henry, 1996; Sarason, 1995; and Strike, 1993), translating this into practice, will be no easy task. There remains the unresolved tension which exists between educators as professionals and parents as active participants in schools. As one teacher said: "Parental involvement, defining it, that is tough." Or as another said "Schools are democracies--but only up to a point." Moving from the rhetoric of the academy to the world of practice is a messy process.

The Study

The goal of this study was to uncover the complexities of today's reform efforts in secondary schools--especially as they apply to the relationships among parents and between parents and educators engaged in reform efforts This study was conducted in a small-town New England high school community undergoing many changes--Grover's Corners[1]. The town was experiencing an in-flux of people "from away"[2] and the school was introducing new teaching and learning practices. Among these new practices were two controversial curriculum reforms, one in math and the other in social studies. In both cases some parents raised concerns about the changes. In the case of the math curriculum, modifications were made as a result of the outcry

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[1] With much humility and with apologies to Thornton Wilder (1938), I borrowed his town, Grover's Corners, as a setting for the readers theater scripts I first wrote. The town we find ourselves in today is rooted in memories of life in small town New England and is reminiscent of the Grover's Corners, created by Wilder. *Our Town* casts a nostalgic shadow of life as it was on the Grover's Corners of today.

[2] In some New England states people not born in the state are referred to as coming "from away."

from parents. In the case of the social studies curriculum--while the program was designed with some parental concerns in mind--some parents still expressed concerns but modifications were not made.

The New Math Curriculum

The new math curriculum was developed by two math educators without the input of parents. It was conceived as an integrated spiraling curriculum with courses renamed from the traditional Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, College Math to the new Math 1, Math 2, Math 3 and Math 4. Classes are grouped heterogeneously and the curriculum promotes cooperative group work.

When presented to the parents, an explosion of opposition occurred. Parents didn't understand the idea of an integrated curriculum, they didn't like the idea of naming the courses Math 1, 2, etc., and they didn't like the idea of heterogeneous classes. Educators felt attacked on all sides. After the initial outburst and angry interactions from both sides, over the next three years parents and educators sat down and hammered out a new approach to the curriculum that, in retrospect, educators say is an even stronger curriculum than the one they first developed.

While, with the help of parents who knew their children well, educators were able to develop a curriculum that has led to significantly improved math performance for all levels of student, in retrospect, educators in this school are still not sure that parents should be involved in curriculum development efforts. Not only are these educators still ambivalent about the role parents should play, but the experience left both educators and parents with angry feelings about each other. Unfortunately the ambivalence still felt by educators about parental participation in curriculum matters suggests that gaining common understandings will not be easy.

The New Social Studies Curriculum

The new social studies course "...is a two-year required course that studies the interrelationships between the State..., the U.S. and the world, past and present...the course includes much more than history and is better described as an integrated social studies course...designed to help students learn the essential concepts, information, and skills they will need as responsible and prosperous citizens in the 21st century" (Thomas, Miller & Walters, 1994).

The three social studies teachers responsible for this new course were leaders in the school's restructuring efforts and had born the brunt of the internal faculty struggles over the long years of debate about the form that reform would take at Grover's Corners High School. Lessons learned from that struggle, as well as lessons learned from the eruption of parental concerns about the math curriculum, caused them to think strategically about introducing their new course.

Attending to parental concerns, while not the primary driving force behind how they designed the course, influenced the way they crafted their course. One of the social studies teachers explains:

> We have made some modifications that we felt didn't compromise the goals and objective of quality learning in ways that would not create unnecessary anxiety in parents. A specific example would be that...parents grew up getting a test every 3 weeks on Friday or whatever. We don't go by any set schedule, we get there when we get there, but we do some core content type testing. We feel that's a confidence builder for the parents--that they know that that's a part of the curriculum and that gives them a sense of confidence that...even if there are some other things in the class that don't seem quite like the way they were when they were in school, this is one that gives us some credibility to have some freedom to do some other things. And gives them some comfort and confidence that the kids aren't just doing a completely "process oriented" or "values oriented" curriculum that's criticized as "mush" and so forth.

The teachers wrote their own textbook distilling American history, sociology and anthropology, political science and economics to core concepts that they thought every student should know; required all students to master this knowledge at an 85% level; and required students to develop and orally present two major end-of-the-year exhibitions. They asked students to take a much more active role in their education and incorporated a variety of instructional strategies (videodiscs, lectures, games) to try to meet the different learning styles and different pace of learning of individual students. Teachers provided, and students, who were having difficulty attaining the 85% mastery of the core knowledge, were required to attend academic coaching after-school.

For the first three years the course was tracked into two levels. With the fourth year, however, the course was grouped heterogeneously but with the opportunity for students to earn an honors designation based on mastering the core content tests the first time they take them. Assessment of student learning was a mixture of traditional multiple choice teacher-made tests for the core knowledge and performance-based assessment of research, analysis, and public presentation skills. Students were required to make two presentations (one in a public forum) during their sophomore and junior years. The sophomore presentations are dramatic monologues written by the student in the voice of a figure in American history. The junior presentations are public policy papers on issues of the student's choosing.

While the curriculum was designed with some parents' concerns in mind, some parents' concerns were not addressed. Some parents believed that the 85% standard for all students was unreasonable for their child and that it was unfair to hold them to such a high standard. There remains a wide gulf between what these three social studies teachers understand are "good" practices and what these parents understand are "good" practices.

Inquiry Approach

This paper is based on an arts-based qualitative inquiry conducted in the Fall of 1994. It is arts-based in the sense that I use Elliot Eisner's work on educational criticism as a guide (Eisner, 1991). Eisner offers art criticism as a model for educational researchers and suggests that educational critics follow the model by first appreciating (coming to know well the phenomenon under study by attending carefully to its specific details and characteristics) the phenomena and then making public what one has learned. He challenges researchers to experiment with a variety of forms as they make public their learnings (Eisner, 1993, 1995).

Following this model, I gained a deep appreciation for what was happening in the school I was studying by using a variety of approaches. I spent three two-week sessions on site. During that time in order to gain an appreciation for the educators' points of view concerning parental attitudes about changing teaching and learning practices I conducted a survey of the entire faculty; I interviewed 21 teachers and administrators, many of whom were actively involved in the school's reform work since its inception; I attended faculty meetings and meetings of planning committees; and I reviewed archival documents related to their reform efforts over the past ten years. In order to understand parental perspectives about these changes I conducted a telephone survey of randomly selected parents (43% responded) of the current twelfth graders (students who were the first to fully experience the two curricula changes I was investigating--math and social studies); I interviewed 38 parents, most of whom had twelfth grade children, but also included some parents of children in other grades due to the difficulty I had in finding enough twelfth grade parents who were willing to talk to me more in depth; I attended meetings of parents; and I reviewed archival documents which included letters from parents concerning past reform efforts.

As I read and reread the transcripts of my interviews of the parents and educators whom I interviewed, it became increasingly clear to me that many times parents and educators speak to each other at cross purposes--neither hearing nor understanding what the other says. It occurred to me that a provocative way of re-presenting what I was finding would be to create dialogue pieces which demonstrated how parents and educators talked without communicating. In the end I went one step further. Taking up the challenge from Eisner (1993) to consider alternative forms of re-presentation, I decided to re-present my findings in the form of two readers theater scripts. I did this for two reasons. The first is that the data I collected seemed to cry out for a form other than the traditional narrative report. And secondly, in thinking about the audience I most wanted to reach--practitioners and parents--it seemed as though readers theater scripts would be more compelling and would have a better chance of inviting parents and practitioners into a dialogue with each other about "good" teaching and learning practices.

Taking up Eisner's challenge to use a variety of genre to re-present learnings, I created two readers theater scripts which addressed the questions: "Is common ground among parents

possible?" and "Is common ground between parents and educators possible?". In addition, I composed an educational critique of the difficulty of attaining common ground among parents and between parents and educators.[3] This is one of three papers presented at this year's Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association which draws on this work (Konzal, 1997a,b). It examines the tension which develops between teachers and parents when teachers attempt to enact their role[4] as professionals.

The Importance of Building Common Understandings About Curriculum and Instructional Practices

The literature on restructuring secondary schools includes two different lines of argument for the importance of building common understandings about what goes on in "good" secondary schools and classrooms. The first focuses on the process of change (Fullan with Steigelbauer, 1991; Senge, 1990) and the second on outcomes (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Hill, 1990; Lightfoot, 1983). The first argument asserts that creating common visions of what goes on in "good" secondary schools is the first step towards creating new organizations. Conversely, in those schools where changes have been made in teaching and learning practices without attention being paid to the process of creating a common "vision" among all constituencies--including parents--resistance to the changes is bound to erupt (For example see: Farkas, 1993; Gold & Miles, 1981; Moffett, 1988; Olson, 1993; Pipho, 1994; Portner, 1995; Seif, 1994).

The second argument for the necessity of common notions about what goes on in "good" high schools strongly suggests that when teachers, students and parents all agree on the core mission, practices, and outcomes of the school, students are apt to be more successful (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Hill, 1990; Lightfoot, 1983). Therefore, for both reasons, it would seem that forging common notions of "good" schools and classroom practices is important. However, our recent reform efforts which encourage the concept of "teacher-as-professional" have created some unintended tensions as schools try to build common understandings between parents and educators. In the following sections I first discuss why it is so difficult for parents and educators to come to common understandings and then I examine two scenarios which present different problems related to the parent/school relationship. The first is a scenario embedded with problems associated with traditional ways of viewing the parent/school relationship and the second is a scenario embedded with the dilemmas presented when teachers see themselves as professionals.

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[3] A full description of my process may be found in Appendix I of my dissertation: Explanation of Inquiry Process (Konzal, 1995).

[4] Throughout the paper I use the language of drama to talk about my understandings. Starratt (1990) provided the metaphor of schooling as drama for me. When viewed through this lens parents and educators are seen as actors playing roles and enacting scripts.

Different Understandings of "Good" Schools and Classroom Practices

Parents resist changes in a secondary school's teaching and learning practices, in many cases, because the changed practices diverge from their understandings of what should go on in a "good" secondary school. Based on their own experiences with schooling, with their children's experiences, and on their aspirations for their children, parents internalize notions of what goes on in "good" secondary schools (Dodd, 1994). Peter Senge, in his book *The Fifth Discipline* (1990), argues that individuals in an organization each bring their own "mental models" about a concept or a word to a discussion and that these "mental models" may differ considerably based on past experiences. Another way of thinking about these "mental models" is that they create internal scripts that we unconsciously enact.

An illuminating example of this emerged during my interviews with the parents of Grover's Corners High School. We were talking about multi-graded classrooms. I spoke with three parents who had attended one-room schoolhouses when they were children. One parent's internal script about multi-graded classrooms was cast in a positive light, while two other parents had internal scripts cast in a negative light. Why? Upon further probing, I found that their scripts were based on their own personal experiences with one-room schoolhouses. For one parent the one-room schoolhouse was a wonderful experience:

> Well I think one of the finest things about the one room schoolhouse was the fact that the older kids helped the younger kids and there was a togetherness...which is not a school competitiveness but there is a togetherness, and they're all one big family. So the older kids help the younger kids and I think that children learn to read a lot faster in that kind of conc[ept] because then you have kids that know the words teaching the younger kids the words [by] teaching them how to sound out the sounds. In a one-room schoolhouse, the teacher [co]uldn't teach everything. The teacher had maybe 15 minutes for each class.....a[nd to] teach everybody something relevant was a real art. And those kind of teachers w[ere] real teachers and...would make the best master teachers today if they were still around, t[hey] are not too many of them around. But teaching, I think its wonderful. I fairly enjoyed sc[h]ool when I was teaching somebody else how to do something, cause I knew, because it helped me learn too. So nothing stopped me from learning. Nothing would stop a person who wants to inquire, learn, to continue learning in that kind of environment.

and for the other two it was a terrible experience

> But down in the lower grades, and again I'm conservative, but I really don't like the idea of combining one, two, and three....Maybe that's because, you know, I was in a one room schoolhouse. That shows how old I am. But, I was in the one-room schoolhouse...until third grade. And I can remember back being a third grader, well [my teacher] says I have to do this for an hour. While I'm doing this she's dealing with a first grader or second grader or other kids. I just have a hard time comprehending that as an advantage to have two or three different grades at one time. Basically the teacher would give an assignment to the third grade and the second grade and work with the first grade. There was a designated time, you know, like this half hour was for them, this half hour, she might combine the math to all three grades. But what good would it do to have a third grader learning how to add one plus one. The third grader was trying to multiply 9 times 18, something like that.

> That's where I just feel, if a child is in the third grade--not all third graders are the same, so how can you have 7 third graders that vary in ability and then have 7 second graders who vary in ability and then have 7 first graders. I mean, you've got 21 kids. You could have 10 different levels of learning amongst those 21 kids, and I think if you have 15 or 18 third graders whatever the class sizes, you're only going to have two or three levels of learning, you're not going to have more than that. And for the teachers, it's got to be very difficult.

and

> If anyone had come to me and said, "I want to put your third grader, or your second grader into a multi-age situation." There is no way I would have ever gone for it. I would have thought "Oh, he'll get lost, they won't tend to him. How can they possibly tend to him if they..." I wouldn't have done it. I wouldn't have done it with my oldest kid who read when he was three. And see, I went to one [one-room schoolhouse] where the eighth grade kid who couldn't read had to sit next to me in the first grade. And I knew even then that that was horrible for him. I did, I sensed that even then. And when that teacher died, a couple years ago, I was home. I wouldn't go to the funeral. My friend that lived next door to me called me and said, "Let's go," and I said, "No, I'm not going." And I wouldn't, I just wouldn't. And I know that [the teacher] didn't know any better than to do what she did. I know it was how she was trained [but] I don't have good feelings about that whole experience.

They each had different "mental models" of "multi-age classrooms" and therefore had created very different internal images, assumptions and scripts. Without probing the differences it would have been impossible to recognize that while we were using the same word, we each assigned very different meanings to it--our mental images of a "multi-aged classroom" differed significantly.

The problems associated with the different mental models held by parents are exacerbated by the different mental models held by many educators and many parents. Recent reports about parents' ideas about what should go on in "good" schools and classrooms differ dramatically from what many educators call for (Johnson & Immerwahr, 1994). Parent resistance to heterogeneous grouping, cooperative group work, whole language literacy programs, and multicultural curricula are just a few instances of this difference. Why is this? One reason is that many educators today are members of national professional networks, belong to professional communities within their schools and regions, and communicate with other professionals via the internet. These associations contribute to the re-defining of mental models held by educators. Together educators construct new mental models replacing those which were embedded by their past histories. While certainly not all educators think alike (the difficulty schools have in developing consensus among faculties attests to this) more and more educators are coming to understand educational practices in ways which diverge more and more from parents. For as educators develop new mental models, parents who are not involved in these professional networks, are left with understandings about "good" practices rooted in their past experiences.

It seems, then, that building parental support for and engagement with reform efforts requires opportunities for building common understandings of words and concepts--for re-casting

our mental models and for rewriting our internal scripts together. Our traditional mode of parent/educator interaction does not allow for such dialogue. Characterized by educator domination and parent passivity (Crowson, 1992) and a lack of mutual trust and respect (Sarason, 1995), opportunities for open and honest debate which are necessary for creating common mental models of "good" secondary schools are limited. Therefore, re-conceptualizing the parent/school relationship so that there are opportunities for building common "mental models" and scripts is needed.

Two Scenarios: Relationships Between Parents and Schools

One of the major contradictions in recent restructuring literature has been the call for raising the status of teaching to that of a profession while at the same time calling for parent participation in decision-making. If left unresolved, the tension between "teacher-as-expert" and "parent-as-decision maker" has the potential of sabotaging efforts at reform (Goldring & Bauch, 1995). Through a review of the literature on teacher professionalization and on parent involvement in restructuring efforts, Goldring and Bauch (1995) created a typology of parent/teacher relationships[5] in the context of school restructuring. This work provides a helpful heuristic for framing the discussion about building common mental models of "good" secondary schools. The typology is framed around two continua: parent participation and teacher participation. Based on these continua, four different relationships are identified: Traditional[6], Teacher Professionalism, Parent Empowerment and Partnership[7]. Each relationship type suggests a scenario and has implications for the roles in which parents and educators are cast and for the barriers presented in terms of moving towards common mental models of "good" secondary schools.

The following is a discussion of two of these scenarios: "traditional" and "teacher professionalism" and their implications for relationships between parents and educators. I examine the difficulties each scenario presents in terms of its potential for including parents in the dialogue about reform, for building common understandings and for writing common scripts about "good" secondary schools. Later in the paper I will examine the "partnership/community" scenario as one that might offer ideas for dealing with the tensions raised by the professional scenario.

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5 While Goldring and Bauch refer to teachers, I will refer to educators because, while teachers and administrators do play different roles, my study focuses on both.

6 In the original paper this relationship was named, Negotiation. However, during telephone conversations with Bauch she indicated that this relationship was reconceptualized as Traditional.

7 I prefer the term Community to Partnership because to me Community implies an interest in balancing the common good with the needs of the individual, while Partnership can be construed to mean a primary focus on individual needs.

Traditional/Bureaucratic Scenario

This scenario is pretty much in disrepute these days. Most educators would not admit to strictly adhering to this script any longer, even though, in practice many still do. In any event, residual effects can still be felt by the imprinted memories of relationships implicit in this scenario. Relationships in this scenario are characterized by deference to power. Teachers defer to administrators (even though once they close their doors they act autonomously) and parents defer to teachers and administrators. For the most part parents are passive and accept the word of the school (Crowson, 1992). And administrators and school boards defer to the power elites (Spring, 1993).

Changes in the school's curriculum and pedagogy are slow and incremental and are constructed so that they are contained within the community's zone of tolerance (Boyd, 1976, 1982; Charters, 1953; McGivney & Moynihan, 1972)]. Boyd, Charters, and McGivney and Moynihan argue that schools are free to make changes in schools as long as they don't violate the community's "margin of tolerance" (Charters) or "zone of tolerance" (McGivney and Moynihan, Boyd). They argue that each community has a zone of tolerance which is comprised of the community's values and expectations and that school policy-makers are free to make changes within that zone. Community resistance to changes within these zones is minimal. However, once the changes start to bump against the edges of these zones, resistance develops and community pressure against the changes erupts. The zone's boundaries are determined by the values, beliefs and expectations of the community. Within these zones educators are free to plan and implement change. Boyd (1976, 1982) goes on to propose that not only does every community have different zone boundaries, but the impact of these zones of tolerance have different degrees of influence depending on a variety of criteria. For instance, schools in large urban areas with a highly bureaucratized central office, exist in an environment where there are multiple communities with different zone boundaries, therefore dissipating the impact of any one community on the actions of the school system. On the other hand, schools located in small towns where the population is more homogeneous (therefore the values and expectations are more homogeneous), are more easily impacted by the zone boundaries. Complicating this picture today is the fact that, except for small rural schools which have not yet been consolidated and which have not experienced an in flux of people without roots in the community, most high schools, suburban and rural, as well as urban, serve multiple communities with different needs, values, and expectations.

It used to be that change in schools in small homogeneous communities could be controlled by these "zones of tolerance". School administrators intimately knew the values and norms of their communities (usually because they were from those communities themselves), and could recognize the "zones of tolerance" within which they had to work. They paid special attention to the values espoused by those with influence in town--the power elites (Spring, 1993). They knew what

changes fit within these zones and would be acceptable to the local community and usually chose not to push beyond these boundaries when considering school programs. While the community served by each high school can differ dramatically, the values, norms, and expectations of those communities shape what happens in the schools. Parents expect that schools will look like the schools they went to when they were in high school--that the rituals and routines will be familiar (Meyer & Rowan, 1978). Their high school experience is vividly etched in their memories. High school meant changing classes, having different students in each of your classes, being scheduled with students who had similar backgrounds as yourself, having teachers who stood in front of the classroom and lectured, responding to multiple choice tests and taking finals. Making changes in these routines requires parents to develop new understandings about schooling. In the traditional scenario administrators make such changes slowly and carefully.

While I'm sure that there still exists in this country a few communities where consensus on what goes on in good schools is easily attainable--with alternative world views seeping into even the most remote communities via the cable transmitter dishes lining our landscapes and the internet-- more and more diverse views are bound to develop. This growing diversity of parent perspectives makes the life of an administrator acting within the traditional bureaucratic scenario much more difficult as they try to anticipate what practices will push too far beyond the edges of the many diverse "zones of tolerance" held by parents in their schools.

Traditional parent/educator relationships are built on the assumption that administrators and teachers should be deferred to and that they make decisions congruent with the beliefs, attitudes and expectations of the dominant parents in their community. What happens when we move from this scenario to one where teacher voices gain privilege? The next scenario explores this question.

Teacher Professionalism Scenario

The current reform effort calls for thinking of the teacher as a professional (i.e.: Lieberman, 1988) and encourages the development of "communities of learners" where teachers are engaged in continuous dialogue to reconstruct their knowledge about teaching and learning practices (i.e.: Sergiovanni, 1994). Whether "professionalism" is interpreted as a lone ranger approach modeled after doctors and lawyers or whether it is interpreted as a collegial relationship where knowledge is constructed through dialogue among colleagues (Goldring & Bauch, 1995), professional expertise is privileged and parents are left out of the picture. The result is that as some teachers develop new understandings, parents are left with notions of schooling based on their own experiences as students.

These models of teacher professionalism cast parents in the role of client. The teacher or teachers (professionals) know what's best for the student and the parent (clients). Casting parents as clients is problematic for a number of reasons. First, it implies that the teacher has a monopoly

on the knowledge-base necessary for making all educational decisions. While the knowledge-base is growing, some argue that it is not clear cut and that it continues to evolve (i.e.: Strike, 1993). Just as the medical profession is under attack for failing to include patients in a partnership to decide on the best course of treatment for an illness, the educational profession is under attack for not including parents in the dialogue about what's best for their children. This argument asserts that just as patients know their bodies well, parents know their children well. In order for the best plans to be made, professional expertise and personal expertise must be considered (Sarason, 1995).

A second reason why this role is problematic is that it likens the teacher to the physician or the lawyer--two professions known for maintaining an unequal relationship with their clients. As Strike (1993) says,

> To be a client is to be someone who is consulted and considered in decision-making and who may have some rights to informed consent, but it is also to be someone who is not a full participant in decision-making. Thus, the relationship is conceptualized as one of unequal status and power. (p. 261)

A second role for parents within this relationship conceptualization is that of customer. Customer in this context differs from the role as described in the "Parent Empowerment" scenario where parents have the right to choose the school for their child (see for example, Chubb & Moe, 1990), since parents in this mode don't necessarily have that power, but rather are in the position of being "sold" new programs. Considering parents as customers within the professionalism scenario is derived from a business metaphor. Schools are viewed as businesses where marketing programs is seen as a high priority. Schools have something to sell and parents are the customers. From this perspective schools create programs based on professional knowledge and create marketing plans to sell them to their customers--parents. Schools find out what parents want and using clever marketing devices sell their products. Schools operating from this perspective view parent/school relationships from a public relations perspective. As Crowson (1992) says:

> To some educators, the terms *community relations* and *public relations* are synonymous. The effective communication of school goals, activities, and achievements to a (hopefully) receptive public would be the simple definition of community relations, from a decidedly public relations (PR) perspective. (pp. 9-10)

In an earlier study of the Grover's Corners School District administrators spoke of their relationships with parents in ways suggesting parents cast as their customers. While they spoke of using multiple approaches to educating parents about the changes in classroom practices, the goal of the interactions was to "sell" parents on the value of these new practices--not to jointly construct new understandings of "good" classroom practices (Konzal, 1994).

Cast in both roles, client and customer, parents in this scenario are expected to view the educator as the expert and while they are consulted about changes, usually the consultation is focused on improving the product not creating it. While in the traditional/bureaucratic scenario, administrators usually paroled the perimeters of the "zones of tolerance" and made sure that changes stayed within the perimeters, with the professionalization of teaching, teachers are more apt to ignore the perimeters and propose changes that challenge these zones. When that occurs the school board acts as a mediator between the power elites of the community and the educators. What follows is the story of one small-town high school and its attempts to include parents in the conversation about what goes on in "good" secondary schools and classrooms.

Grover's Corners: Is Common Ground Possible Between Parents and Educators?

When parent participation overshadows teacher professionalism, parent voices are privileged. And when teacher professionalism overshadows parent participation, teacher voices are privileged. Those who call for redistributing power from educators to parents argue that parents know what is best for their children and should have the power to make the educational decisions that effect them either through holding the majority of power on school councils (e.g. Fine, 1993) or through the power to choose the school their child attends (e.g. Chubb & Moe, 1990). On the other hand, those who call for professional communities, ask teachers (and building administrators) to create professional cultures in schools, to become the experts about teaching and learning practices and seeks to give them the authority to make those decisions (i.e.: Lieberman, 1988) . And those who call for community call for balancing the voices of both professionals and parents. Along with Goldring and Bauch (1995), Henry (1994), Sarason (1995), and Strike (1993) I call for a move towards community. That road, however, is filled with many obstacles. As schools move from the traditional scenario to enact the teacher professionalism scenario new tensions between parents and teachers develop. Using Grover's Corners High School as the setting, the following section "Is Common Ground Possible Between Educators and Parents?", attempts to peel back the layers of these tensions

Teacher as Professional

> Professionalism is teacher voice, it is a respect of teachers, it is a sense that teachers can make decisions, they can be trusted to make decisions. That was a key cornerstone of what the [previous] superintendent brought to this organization.
>
> *Grover's Corners Superintendent of Schools*

Grover's Corners High School has been involved in reform efforts since the mid-1980s. Under the direction of the superintendent at the time, teachers were encouraged to take the role of

professional and educational expert. They were asked to discard the teacher scripts that were written for them by administrators and textbook publishers and to write new scripts for themselves. These new scripts would encode their new roles and allow them to become more active inquirers into how children learned and to take more responsibility in determining how and what they were to teach. This was quite a difference from previous scripts which required teachers to ask permission to get construction paper from locked supply closets! Since that time, with the encouragement of the previous superintendent and the current superintendent more and more teachers have begun to assume the role of professional educational expert and to write scripts which cast themselves in leadership and decision-making roles, especially around issues of curriculum and pedagogy. The two curriculum innovations examined in this study, the integrated math curriculum and the two-year social studies required course, were the result of teachers who took seriously their new roles--they initiated, designed and implemented the new courses. While each case differs in many respects (initial implementation plan, degree of opposition from parents, characteristics of parents who opposed programs) both cases illuminate obstacles emanating from a move from the traditional scenario to the professional scenario. This new scenario--teacher professionalism--created new roles and scripts which created barriers and prevented parents and teachers from coming to common understandings about what goes on in good high schools. Obstacles include a widening gap between educator and parent mental models and educator ambivalence concerning parent participation.

Widening the Gap Between Educator and Parent Mental Models

New roles and scripts required new stances and new language. Newly cast as experts, these teachers took action to solidify their stance as professional educators. In both cases the teachers immersed themselves in professional networks and participated in the current discourse about curriculum and pedagogy in their fields. Through their participation in these networks they developed new "mental models" (Senge, 1990) about what "good" curriculum and pedagogy looks like in their respective disciplines. They also developed a common language to describe these changes. Unfortunately, parents, who were cast as clients, were not part of these networks and were not simultaneously developing new mental models or a new language. They were left with their own idiosyncratic mental models, influenced by their experiences with their own schooling, with their children's schooling and by their aspirations for their children. So while teachers were enacting scripts written about the benefits of heterogeneous grouping, integrated curriculum, authentic problem-solving and exhibitions, many parents continued to enact scripts written when they were in school, scripts which honored homogeneous grouping, separate disciplines, and basic skills. Following the dictates of their new role as professional and as expert, teachers developed their new courses without input by parents and introduced them without warning. Parents, in their

role as clients, were expected to accept these innovations on the advice of the teachers--the professionals--who were the experts on such matters. The advantage of such a scenario--of introducing new programs on the advice of the educational professionals--without parent participation--is that programs don't get delayed by, at best, helping parents to understand the new "mental models" and the new language, or, at worst, by negotiating around parent concerns and fears. As one teacher put it

> If the [math teachers] had yielded to the...most vocal community, [they] would have put water on a spark that may be one of the most powerful fires, if you will, in education reform....If [the social studies teachers] had opened it up to a democratic vote on whether all children should have to do a public policy paper, we'd still be wrangling around those issues four years hence and we still wouldn't have been able to have one child have the success that they've shown...*Teacher Leader*

On the other hand, had they modified their understanding of their role of professional expert to include asking parents about the proposed changes prior to implementing them, they might have prevented some of the rancorous meetings they had once parents found out about the changes and they might have come up with the grouping model they finally implemented three years into the program (grouping and regrouping) at an earlier time. After all, it was the concerns of the parents that finally led to the improved practice. And had they gone one step further and involved parents in their "learning community" while they were exploring and learning about different approaches to the math curriculum--while it would most certainly have taken longer--they might have not only come to common understandings about good practices, but they might have also built a foundation of trust and respect.

Educator Ambivalence Concerning Parent Participation

Ambivalence about involving parents in planning new programs had roots in both the traditional/bureaucratic scenario they were renouncing and in the professionalism scenario which they were embracing.

Following from the traditional/bureaucratic scenario and continuing into the "teacher professionalism" scenario, parents enact their role as advocate for their own child. In this role parents petition the school when they think that the school is not acting in their child's best interests. While many times, parents approach the school timidly, after all, the school knows what is best in these scenarios, at other times, parents do this in ways that educators find offensive. Angry and on the defensive, parents approach the school with voices raised and threats of law suits in the air. These are not very pleasant occasions for educators. In addition, as Lagemann (1993) points out, parents don't always know what is best for their children and we must be careful not to romanticize them. Grover's Corners educators pointed out a number of instances where school

interventions, both social and academic, were needed, in order to protect children from, at best, ill-conceived parental actions.

Teacher concerns also emanated from attempts to enact the new scenario--teacher professionalism. They chose (although probably not in a deliberative way) to place their internal struggle to gain consensus within their professional community as a priority over the need to involve parents in the process. For at least the first five years of their formal restructuring efforts teachers at Grover's Corners High School were locked in intense debates about the direction of the school. Disagreements were strong and factions developed. Dissonance still can be found within the ranks of teachers, though with not as forceful a voice. These were days of an inward focus. Attention to including parents was peripheral at best.

And probably, most importantly, as teachers and administrators from Grover's Corners High School developed in their roles as professional educational experts, they became more and more ambivalent philosophically about the role that parents should play in decisions about curriculum and pedagogy. Teachers wanted parents to play a supporting role in their children's schooling. When surveyed teachers wholeheartedly supported parent participation in their children's schooling--as long as it was limited to advocating for their children's individual needs, monitoring their individual children's programs, and encouraging their children to meet the school's expectations. Equal billing with teachers on educational matters was frowned upon. Participating in planning new programs was not nearly as universally approved by teachers. Grover's Corners' teachers struggled with the question of how, when and why to involve parents in planning. Should the script be rewritten again, to call for a more central role for parents? For instance listen to one of the teachers active in the school reform efforts struggle with these questions:

> It would be fairly rare, in modern medicine for doctors to bring their patients together and ask them which kind of technical technique or chemicals would best help the healing process. Now it may be worthwhile to bring patients together about service issues and fee issues and how comfortable they feel with the doctor-- that might be important--but the technical aspects are left to the doctors. Why is education different? Because most people in our society have a high school education, there's an assumption that most people are educational experts or at least they're close to it, even though that isn't the case. And so there's a level at which there's some kind of automatic democratization of the profession. I think that's overall good. But I think one of the questions that we don't ask is "In what way are parents most effectively involved in the educational process?
>
> *Social Studies Teacher*

Other teachers also struggled with these questions. In one moment of frustration, one proclaimed:

> I don't give a tinker's damn what parents think! That's the problem with asking parents for their input. They think that we will use it all--when they're just thinking about what's good for their kid. We have to think about what's good for all kids. *Teacher*

and in a more reflective moment another remarked:

> I felt at times like, they didn't respect my professional judgment....I don't mind if people disagree with me, that happens. I disagree with other people too, but not in a disrespectful way. I got the feeling that they thought we were experimenting or willy-nilly just making changes without really much thought. *Teacher*

As a result of their ambivalence about parent participation in planning and in their desire to move quickly the social studies and math teachers chose not to involve parents in the development of their program and as a result wound up having to enact a scene they didn't expect--one which dealt with parent resistance to the changes. In reflecting on that decision one social studies teacher said:

> [When developing the K-12 curriculum] we asked members of the community "What do you think social studies should be?" And we could have done that [for this course]. We could have involved parents earlier on....I don't know if it was just oversight or just a matter of time....I think probably the time more than anything else. We felt pretty confident that we knew what students needed to know and be able to do when they left high school. I think we could have done more of sending out something to parents. I don't know what we might have gotten, a 10% return, who knows when you send those things out. We could have sent out "What would you like your student to know and be able to do? What issues facing the world would you like them to know?" And we then could have helped that inform us and also provide us a vehicle to communicate with parents at that early stage. I think our communication had tended to come after the fact to inform[parents] of these changes rather then involve [them] in these changes....I don't know how it would have worked... but in looking back it may have caused us more [problems] and possibly slowed us down even more....And I think we felt it was time we had to move. We had to act. Because we also had some other things that we had to look at here. Logistic things. Our interest was moving the required social studies from junior and senior year down to sophomore and junior year. There's some big issues - curriculum wise, turf wise. Now we're going to add a social studies [course] at [the] sophomore [level] when there's already a required English, a required science, and a required math. When is a kid supposed to take my course? So we also had to deal with some internal things that I think, looking back our own development and internal changes, that took a higher priority then involving parents. *Social Studies Teacher*

When these teachers rewrote their scripts and recast their roles as professional experts they charged ahead without questioning the limits of their new roles. However, new to the roles and eager to forge ahead, they did not recognize what bureaucratic educational leaders knew--that pushing beyond the traditions, rituals and routines of schooling would cause discomfort and concern among the parent community and headaches for educational leaders (Boyd, 1982; Meyer & Rowan, 1978). When teachers messed with traditional routines like grouping practices (heterogeneous grouping versus homogeneous grouping), renaming courses from the traditional

Algebra, etc. to Math 1, and raising the passing grade from 65% to 85%, they raised the ire of the parents, who then began asking questions about what was going on in these classes. Meyer and Rowan (1978) argue that when school traditions are maintained, parents are less likely to raise questions about what goes on inside classrooms, but once these traditions are violated, parental confidence in the school is eroded and questions about classroom practices follow. This is indeed what happened in Grover's Corners. Changes such as those listed above challenged parents' understandings about what schools looked like. Schools they knew had classes called Algebra, Geometry, or Trigonometry, not Math 1 or Math 2 or Math 3. Schools they knew grouped homogeneously, not heterogeneously, and schools they knew had 65% as passing, not 85%. As one parent argued with the principal, "Passing at 65% is state law."

As noted earlier, Boyd (1982) argues that schools are free to make changes within a "zone of tolerance" which is bounded by the values, beliefs and expectations of the community, but once the changes push against that boundary parent concerns are raised. In the old bureaucratic scenario, many administrators carefully assessed changes to assure that they didn't push past these boundaries. On the other hand, Grover's Corners' math and social studies teachers in the role of professional expert, emboldened by their new roles and knowledge, didn't write such concerns into their scripts or if they did, chose to ignore them for these particular changes. While in their reflections about their planning process, they acknowledged that parents would have difficulty with some of the changes, and in fact some teachers had made some decisions to modify some of their plans based on their desire to minimize parental resistance, they chose to move forward with changes which were bound to create discomfort. They pushed the edges of the "zone of tolerance." However, even had the teachers attempted to stay within Grover's Corners "zone of tolerance", they would have found it difficult. Within Grover's Corners, as in most towns today, the growing diversity of the population makes it difficult to determine just which "zone of tolerance" should be attended to, for different parents, depending on their world view have different "zones of tolerance." Grover's Corners, while not as diverse as many towns, when examined closely has differences based on social class, place of origin, educational experiences, and aspirations for their children. Social class played a determining role in the outcomes around these two dramas.

Protests about these two programs came from different sets of parents. The changes in the math program elicited protests from parents primarily of high achieving students--many of whom were powerful parents within the community--parents who had access to "cultural capital" (Lareau, 1989) and who knew how to influence the system. On the other hand, the changes in the social studies program elicited protests primarily from parents of low achieving children--parents who more often than not represented the working class in town and who didn't have access to the "cultural capital" needed to influence the system. The protests to the math program raised debate

throughout the community's elite. Week-end dinner parties attended by influential school board members buzzed with conversations about these concerns. The social studies debate was not nearly as charged. There were probably many reasons for this (social studies is not viewed as critical to a child's life chances as is math, the school board was in favor of raising standards, the social studies teachers had learned from the experiences of the math teachers and had made some modifications to the program before implementing it in order to mollify parent concerns, and the initial implementation of the program had gone much more smoothly than did the math program's), but certainly an equally important factor is that those raising the concerns were not nearly as influential. In the end, heterogeneous grouping was modified, while the passing grade for social studies was not modified.

Another Scenario: Community

An alternative option for educators newly cast as professionals, one with the potential of eliminating the rancorous "us" against "them" debates that grew out of these two attempts to change classroom practices, is to rewrite their scripts in ways which allow them to rethink their roles as professional experts and their relationships with parents. Crowson (1992) and Henry (1994) argue that teachers need to redefine professionalism to include building mutual relationships with parents--relationships where dialogue about schooling can take place with mutual trust and respect. They argue that educators will have to temper their belief in professional knowledge with respect for parental knowledge about their child's needs and their community values. They argue that educators would spend their time wisely in improvising new scenarios which engage parents in the dialogue about schooling.

What seems clear is that time will have to be expended towards involving parents in dialogue about changes in teaching and learning practices--especially those practices that push against the expectations and values of parents, those that rewrite the schooling script. What educators must decide is whether they want to write the scene in early in the drama or late in the drama. I'm not sure whether these teachers, given the opportunity to do it all over again, would do it differently. For with all the concerns expressed, these programs are in operation and some of the initial commotion has pretty much settled down. But as I talked to parents, their frustrations concerning these changes, while no longer overt, were still simmering beneath the surface, ready to erupt at the slightest provocation. Educator ambivalence towards parents resulted in undermining parental trust and the gap between educator and parent mental models of what goes on in good schools continued to widen.

Partnership or Community?

The notion of parent as partner is widespread in today's reform literature. It seems to mean different things to different people. Chief among the proponents of the partnership role for parents is Joyce Epstein. When Epstein (1993) speaks of partnership she envisions parents and teachers working together to meet the needs of individual children. She talks about parents' basic obligations (providing a safe and nurturing home); about a schools' basic obligations (communicating with parents); about parent roles in schools (volunteers and audiences); and about involvement in learning activities at home (helping with homework, reading to child) (Bauch, 1994). While she also speaks about participation in governance, and collaboration with community groups, Ehman (1995) and Goldring and Bauch (1995) argue that Epstein's focus is primarily on the first four types of involvement. She focuses on those types of involvement that have been shown to improve student achievement within the framework of schools as they are now, rather than on those types of involvement which challenge the current structures.

Reform for Epstein requires schools to invite parents into a partnership with educators which focuses on engaging parents in their child's school work, without necessarily changing classroom curriculum and pedagogy. While Epstein paints us a picture where parents and educators work together for the benefit of individual children, she ignores issues of power and of organizational norms which influence the ability of an organization to create the partnerships she envisions. Additionally, the role of partner as envisioned by Epstein can be interpreted to encourage and perpetuate parents as advocates solely for their own children within the context of existing structures. It doesn't necessarily encourage parents to broaden their lens' and to seek new structures which would assure positive schooling for <u>all</u> children in their community. I, along with others, suggest that there is another way to conceptualize of the parent/school relationship--one where parents advocate for their child <u>and</u> for all children--parent-as-community member.

Henry (1994; 1996) and Strike (1993) argue for casting parents as community members. Arguing from a feminist perspective, Henry (1994; 1996), arguing from a feminist perspective, suggests that traditional ways of involving parents as partners in decision-making are counterproductive. Using Tønnies (1957) concept of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*, she explains the contradictions between the goals of parental involvement and proposed formal processes, such as site-based management councils. She describes the difference between these two concepts in this way:

> A *gesellschaft* interpretation of education rests on the assumption that schools are like corporations. Stakeholders have a right to know what is going on, but professionals take care of the actual operation of the school. Community thus focuses on specialized contributions of individuals toward the common good. Public schools are more typically seen as gesellschaft institutions-bureaucratic, somewhat distanced from the social context,

> with clients (parents/lay people) and providers (teachers/professionals) separate in their roles and responsibilities. (Henry, 1994, pp. 5-6)
>
> A *gemeinschaft* interpretation of education focuses instead on the common feelings, traditions and goodwill that bond people in a community together. Dewey argued, for instance, that the school needed to be a "little community" (1938). School was to be an extension of daily life, so that what one learned in the course of life could be elaborated on and extended in the school context...Dewey (1938) not only emphasized linkages between school and community, and the importance of building community, but the nature or *relationships* in education--between teacher and student, teacher and teacher, teacher and principal, principal and parent, parent and teacher, and so on. (Henry, 1994, p.6)

Henry (1994) argues that the aims of the reforms of today are more *gemeinschaft*-like while the proposed processes for reform are more *gesellschaft*-like. This contradiction explains why these reforms have not proven to be successful (for example, see Malen & Ogawa, 1988). Henry (1994) argues the development of "authentic parent involvement" and "community-building" cannot rely on bureaucratic structures like mandated decision-making councils--but rather must develop as a result of caring, responsive relationships. Informal rather than formal, *gemeinschaft*-like rather than *gesellschaft*-like interactions (or as one administrator called them, "small practices"--those one-on-one interactions which occur between teachers and parents on a daily basis) are the most important ways of building authentic relationships (Konzal, 1994).

Strike (1993) draws from Habermas' notion of a "discursive democratic community". This is a community, small enough where all members can participate in reasoned debate about the issues they face and work to reach consensus. He argues for a community where teachers, administrators and parents confront issues of structure, pedagogy and curriculum together. And while he thinks of the teachers as "first among equals" (p. 270), he expects that they would have to make arguments good enough to convince parents of their value. They couldn't move forward without the consensus of the whole. He recognizes that to make such an idea work people with similar values and beliefs--a community of people with like minds--would be most beneficial. Charter schools, places where teachers and parents come together with like minds is one way of conceptualizing such a community and in fact Strike offers a proposed structure which looks very much like charter schools--with one exception. Strike maintains a school board in his model. He does so because he acknowledges that the idea of a democratic discursive community is based on an idealized sense of reality which doesn't confront the real-world issues of what to do when consensus can't be reached. Strike proposes a revised conception of school boards--where ideas originate in the schools and where school boards are the court of last resort when consensus at the school level can't be reached.

Building Communities Inclusive of Parents: A Possibility or a Pipe Dream?

I began this educational inquiry with a naive belief in the power of community. If we could only bring parents, with all of their diverse views together with teachers and administrators to talk with each other, to create a school community inclusive of parents, we could assure the development of common understandings of what goes on in "good" high schools. And I think I also believed, although I'm sure I wasn't consciously aware of it, that these common understandings would probably correspond closely with my own ideas about good schools. This study has helped me to develop an appreciation for the complexity inherent in reaching consensus--a true consensus which doesn't mean convincing parents that educator's views are the "correct" views, but which means educators learning from parents and parents learning from educators as they develop common understandings about "good" teaching and learning practices. While the school reform drama enacted at Grover's Corners High School raises serious questions about the ability of parents and educators to create inclusive communities where common mental models about "good" secondary schools can be forged, I along with Henry (1994; 1996), Sarason,(1995), and Strike (1993) am hopeful that schools will recognize the importance of this work and commit themselves to the difficult process.

One major issue facing educators who attempt this path is time. Ask any teacher or principal involved in change efforts in their school and they will tell you that there is not enough time to plan, to meet with their colleagues, to build consensus among faculty members. If this is the case, what possibility is there that they will find the even more time that would be necessary to involve parents in the struggle. For not only do more people make it more complicated, but since parents start with mental models which are even more divergent that those of educators, even more time will be necessary to build a common language and common understandings. This inquiry does not pretend to provide solutions for the dilemma presented. On the one hand, it is clear that "good" secondary schools are places where all--teachers, administrators, students, and parents--agree on the purposes, processes and outcomes of schooling. Yet, on the other hand, it is clear that there is ambivalence among educators about whether or not they are willing to go beyond rhetoric and commit themselves to the difficult task of creating learning communities inclusive of parents.

While parent choice, charter schools and smaller focused public schools present some possibilities which address this dilemma I wonder if there are not other measures that existing local public secondary schools can take which would allow them to more forward on this difficult journey and lessen the divide between parents and educators? I am not so naive as to suggest that local public schools try to eliminate a parent's advocacy for their own child in favor of <u>all</u> children, or that educators willingly give up their professional prerogative. The political maneuvering which is common in schools will not be eliminated, it will continue to be played out, but possibly the

script can be rewritten to focus on themes of "my child *and* all children" as well as "professional knowledge *and* parental knowledge." Are there steps which schools can take which would encourage parents to seek a balance between the needs of their child and those of all children, and steps which would encourage educators to embrace parent participation in the schooling debate? As I noted earlier an elementary school principal in the Grover's Corners school district coined the phrase "small practices" when talking about the one-on-one interactions teachers and parents have on a daily basis. This notion of "small practices", grounded in a *gemeinschaft* orientation, might suggest ways to build relationships between parents and educators to support the formation of school communities inclusive of parents. Whether local public secondary schools, given all of the complex dilemmas illuminated in this paper, can build such communities is still unanswered. However, if we are to have any chance of forging the common notions of schooling necessary for strong secondary schools, I believe we must try.

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** part of name or title changed to protect anonymity